

Elders

Titles for the Office of “Pastor” or “Elder” or “Overseer”

In the Bible:

- 1) The following words are used interchangeably in the New Testament when referring to the office in the local church:¹
 - a) *Elder*—πρεσβύτερος
 - b) *Shepherd* or *Pastor*—ποιμήν; verbal form—ποιμαίνω
 - c) *Bishops* or *Overseer*—ἐπισκοπή; verbal form—ἐπισκοπέω
 - i) ^{NAU} **Acts 20:17, 28** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church (τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας). . . .²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock (τῷ ποιμνίῳ), among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπισκόπους), to shepherd (ποιμαίνειν) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
 - ii) ^{NAU} **1 Peter 5:1-2** Therefore, I exhort the elders (πρεσβυτέρους) among you, as *your* fellow elder (ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος) and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,² shepherd (ποιμάνατε) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (ἐπισκοποῦντες) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;
 - iii) ^{NAU} **Titus 1:5-7** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders (πρεσβυτέρους) in every city (κατὰ πόλιν) as I directed you,⁶ *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.⁷ For the overseer (τὸν ἐπίσκοπον) must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,
 - iv) ^{NAU} **1 Peter 2:25** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian (τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον) of your souls.

¹ Mark Dever, *By Whose Authority? Elders in Baptist Life* (Washington, D.C.:9Marks, 2006), 5.

As Understood by Baptists in the Past

- 1) *Second London Confession, 1677* (historically, one of the most important of all Baptist Confessions) (a.k.a. *The 1689 Second London Confession*):
 - a) Chapter 26:8 “Of the Church”: “A particular Church gathered, and completely Organized, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers, and Members; And the Officers appointed by *Christ* to be chosen and set apart by the Church (so called and gathered) for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of Power, or Duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons (Act. 20.17 with v. 28. Phil. 1.1).”²
 - i) Dever notes: “Though the London Confession simply re-affirmed much of the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, and in several places the Congregationalist Savoy Declaration, this particular section was wholly new, authored by the Baptist ministers who assembled in 1677.”³
- 2) *The New Hampshire Confession, 1833*:
 - a) Section xiii. “Of a Gospel Church”:
 - i) “[We believe] That a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws; and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his word; that its only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.”⁴
- 3) *The Abstract of Principles, 1859*:
 - a) Section XIV. “The Church”:
 - i) “The Lord Jesus is the head of the Church, which is composed of all His true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to His commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches He hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which He hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are Bishops or Elders, and Deacons.”
- 4) *1925 Baptist Faith and Message Statement*:
 - a) Section 12. “A GOSPEL CHURCH”:
 - i) “A church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the ordinances of Christ, governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in them by his word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Its Scriptural officers are bishops or elders and deacons.”

² William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1978), 287.

³ Dever, *Whose Authority*, 6.

⁴ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 365-66.